

How Wool is Sold

Left: After wool is shorn, a sample fleece is weighed. **Below:** Wool is then 'classed', that is divided according to its quality. This is done at the shearing shed or at central depots. Scientific analysis helps the classers.



Left: Rounding up sheep for shearing. Today much of this is done with a motor cycle, especially in dry inland areas where sheep runs are very large with few sheep per acre. Sheepdogs are still important however, especially the kelpie, a unique Australian breed.

Below: Wool buyers looking at wool samples in bins at the central depot, near where auctions are held. Older methods included buyers examining actual bales of wool, but today mainly samples only, are examined.



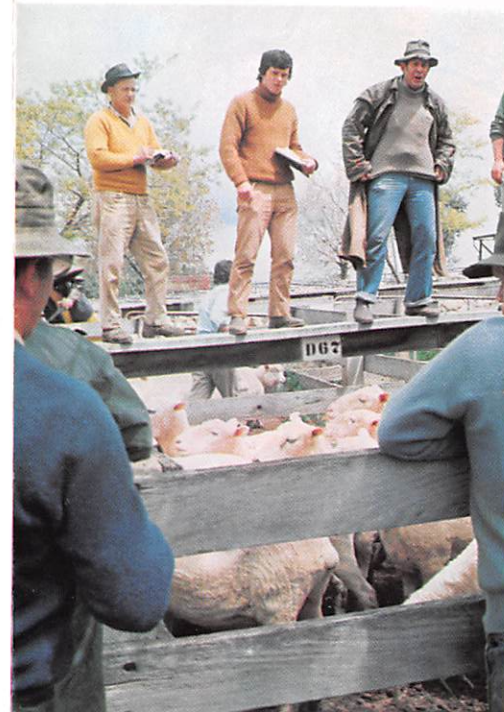
Right: Supplementary feeding. Lambs are often given extra foodstuffs to fatten them up before being sent to market to sell. In times of drought, sheep have often to be given extra feed because there is not enough grass for them.



Below: Wool buyers bidding at wool sales after examining the samples. The Australian Wool Corporation sets a reserve price on each grade of wool — if the wool does not reach this the Corporation buys it for later re-sale when prices improve. Prices fluctuate due to demand for wool and wool suffers from competition from man made fibres like polyester. Today



Australia produces about 25% of the world's wool but about 56% of merino wool. Nearly all our wool is exported, approx. 30% to Japan. Wool earns about 10% of Australia's export income, much less than in the 1960's when it earned up to 50%. This is only partly due to decline in demand for wool, more to the rise in other exports, especially minerals.



Left: Auctioning sheep. From 1929-1980 merino rams were banned from export except to N.Z. as the industry feared other countries would develop their wool industries and compete with Australia. Recently about 300 per year are allowed to be exported. About 40 million sheep are killed each year for meat. Australians eat about 16 klg. of lamb and 8 klg. of mutton per person per year. Most lambs are sold when they are 16-24 weeks old. Much of this lamb is exported, the Middle East being our major customer taking more than half our lamb exports as well as thousands of live sheep. This export of live sheep is controversial, as many people, particularly abattoir workers, feel this takes work away from Australians.